

Plutarch's Life of Pericles

(Primary Source)

XII. But that which brought most delightful adornment to Athens, and the greatest amazement to the rest of mankind; that which alone now testifies for Hellas that her ancient power and splendour, of which so much is told, was no idle fiction,—I mean his construction of sacred edifices,—this, more than all the public measures of Pericles, his enemies maligned and slandered. They cried out in the assemblies: "The people has lost its fair fame and is in ill repute because it has removed the public moneys of the Hellenes from Delos into its own keeping, and that seemliest of all excuses which it had urge against its accusers, to wit, that out of fear of the Barbarians it took the public funds from that sacred isle and was now guarding them in a stronghold, of this Pericles has robbed it. And surely Hellas is insulted with a dire insult and manifestly subjected to tyranny when she sees that, with her own enforced contributions for the war, we are gilding and adorning our city, which, for all the world like a wanton woman, adds to her wardrobe precious stones and costly statues and temples worth their millions."

For his part, Pericles would instruct the people that it owed no account of their moneys to the allies provided it carried on the war for them and kept off the Barbarians; "not a horse do they furnish," said he, "not a ship, not a hoplite, but money simply; and this belongs, not to those who give it, but those who take it, if only they furnish that which they take it in pay. And it is but meet that the city, when once she is sufficiently equipped with all that is necessary for prosecuting the war, should apply her abundance to such works as, by their completion, will bring her everlasting glory, and while in process of completion will bring that abundance into actual service, in that all sorts of activity and diversified demand arise, which rouse every art and stir every hand, and bring, as it were, the whole city under pay, so that she not only adorns, but supports herself as well from her own resources."

And it was true that his military expeditions supplied those who were full of vigour of manhood with abundant resources from the common funds, and in his desire that the unwarlike throng of common labourers should neither have no share at all in the public receipts, nor yet get fees for laziness and idleness, he boldly suggested to the people projects for great constructions, and designs for work which would call many arts into play and involve long periods of time, in order that the stay-at-homes, no whit less than the sailors and the sentinels and soldiers, might have a pretext

for getting a beneficial share of the public wealth. The materials to be used were stone, bronze, ivory, gold, ebony, and cypress-wood; the arts which should elaborate and work up these materials were those of carpenter, moulder, bronze-smith, stone-cutter, dyer, worker in gold and ivory, painter, embroiderer, embosser, to say nothing of the forwarders and furnishers of the material, such factors, sailors, and pilots by sea, and, by land, wagon-makers, trainers of yoked beasts, and drivers. There were also rope-makers, weavers, leather-workers, road-builders, and miners. And since each particular art, like a general with the army under his separate command, kept its own throng of unskilled and untrained labourers in compact array, to be as instrument unto player and as body unto soul in subordinate service, it came to pass that for every age, almost, and every capacity the city's great abundance was distributed and scattered abroad by such demands.

XIII. So then the works arose, no less towering in their grandeur than inimitable in the grace of their outlines, since the workmen eagerly strove to surpass themselves in the beauty of their handicraft. And yet the most wonderful thing about them was the speed with which they rose. Each one of them, men thought, would require many successive generations to complete, but all of them were fully completed in the heyday of a single administration. And yet they say that once on a time when Agatharchus the painter was boasting loudly of the speed and ease with which he made his figures, Zeuxis heard him, and said, "Mine take, and last a long time." And it is true that deftness and speed in working do not impart to the work an abiding weight of influence nor an exactness of beauty; whereas the time which is put out to loan in laboriously creating, pays a large and generous interest in the preservation of the creation. For this reason are the works of Pericles all the more to be wondered at; they were created in a short time for all time. Each one of them, in its beauty, was even then and at once antique; but in the freshness of its vigour it is, even to the present day, recent and newly wrought. Such is the bloom of perpetual newness, as it were; upon these works of his, which makes them ever untouched by time, as though the faltering breath of an ageless spirit had been infused into them.

His general manager and general overseer was Pheidias, although the several works had great architects and artists besides. Of the Parthenon, for instance, with its cella of a hundred feet in length, Callicrates and Ictinus were the architects; it was Coroebus who began to build the sanctuary of the mysteries at Eleusis, and he planted the columns on the floor and yoked their capitals together with architraves; but on his death

Metagenes, of the deme Xypete, carried up the frieze and the upper tier of columns; while Xenocles, of the deme Cholargus, set on high the lantern over the shrine. For the long wall, concerning which Socrates says he himself heard Pericles introduce a measure, Callicrates was the contractor. Cratinus pokes fun at this work for its slow progress, and in these words:

"Since so long now

In word has Pericles pushed the thing; in fact he does not budge it."

The Odeum, which was arranged internally with many tiers of seats and many pillars, and which had a roof made with a circular slope from a single peak, they say was an exact reproduction of the Great King's pavilion, and this too was built under the superintendence of Pericles. Wherefore Cratinus, in his "Thracian Women," rails at him again:—

"The squill-head Zeus! lo! here comes, The Odeum like a cap upon his cranium, Now that for good and all the ostracism is o'er."

Then first did Pericles, so fond of honour was he, get a decree passed that a musical contest be held as part of the Panathenaic festival. He himself was elected manager, and prescribed how the contestants must blow the flute, or sing, or pluck the zither. These musical contest were witnessed, both then and thereafter, in the Odeum.

The Propylaea of the acropolis was brought to completion in the space of five years, Mnesicles being its architect. A wonderful thing happened in the course of the building, which indicated that the goddess was not holding herself aloof, but was a helper both in the inception and in the completion of the work. One of its artificers, the most active and zealous of them all, lost his footing and fell from a great height, and lay in a sorry plight, despaired of by the physicians. Pericles was much cast down at this, but the goddess appeared to him in a dream and prescribed a course of treatment for him to use, so that he speedily and easily healed the man. It was in commemoration of this that he set up the bronze statue of Athena Hygieia on the acropolis near the altar of that goddess, which was there before, as they say.

But it was Pheidias who produced the great golden image of the goddess, and he is duly inscribed on the tablet as the workman who made it. Everything, almost, was under his charge, and all the artists and artisans, as I have said, were under his superintendence, owing to his friendship

with Pericles. This brought envy upon the one, and contumely on the other, to the effect that Pheidias made assignations for Pericles with free-born women who would come ostensibly to see the works of art. The comic poets took up this story and bespattered Pericles with charges of abounding wantonness, connecting their slanders with the wife of Menippus, a man who was his friend, and a colleague in the generalship, and with the bird-culture of Pyrilampes, who, since he was the comrade of Pericles, was accused of using his peacocks to bribe the women with whom Pericles consorted.

And why should any one be astonished that men of wanton life lose no occasion for offering up sacrifices, as it were, of contumelious abuse of their superiors, to the evil deity of popular envy, when even Stesimbrotus of Thasos has ventured to make public charge against Pericles of a dreadful and fabulous impiety with his son's wife? To such degree, it seems, is truth hedged about with difficulty and hard to capture by research, since those who come after the events in question find that lapse of time is an obstacle to their proper perception of them; while the research of their contemporaries into men's deeds and lives, partly through envious hatred and partly through the fawning flattery, defiles and distorts the truth.

Plutarch. *Plutarch's Cimon and Pericles, with the Funeral Oration of Pericles*. Bernadotte Perrin, trans. (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1910).